

LET'S TALK GNV: ELECTION EDITION

*A closer look at the At-Large District 1
Candidates*

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CANDIDATE: HARVEY BUDD

Profile by Narrelle Gilchrist, Student Fellow



Incumbent Gainesville City Commissioner Harvey Budd has been a public servant in Gainesville since his early 20s. After graduating from the University of Florida with an accounting degree, Mr. Budd established his voice in the community at a young age, serving on the City of Gainesville Cultural Commission and the Gainesville City Planning Board. Later, he would work in TV and radio broadcasting, and successfully built and operated Gainesville's WGFL-CBS 4 station.

Born in England and raised in Australia, Mr. Budd moved to Florida when he was 15 years old and became a naturalized US citizen. As a Jewish immigrant, he has a unique perspective on the issues facing the diverse city of Gainesville. What concerns him most about the city, Mr. Budd says, is the drastic disparity between the west and the east. Struggling neighborhoods in eastern Gainesville clearly show the impact of poverty on the community. Inequity also exists in the criminal justice system, and Mr. Budd believes too many people are being sent behind bars. In his second term as city commissioner, Mr. Budd hopes to "change the dynamics" of eastern Gainesville by bringing more jobs to the area and spurring development. Affordable houses can be financed and built by local developers, and Mr. Budd says that he has the contacts to make that happen.

As the eldest member of the city commission, Mr. Budd believes his biggest selling point is his experience. His 53 years of working as a public servant in Gainesville have taught him how to be productive and effective. "Experience that matters" is his 2018 campaign theme, and he believes the variety of his experience in public service sets him apart from his opponent. Having worked with organizations focusing on finance, arts, education, and healthcare, Mr. Budd feels prepared for the range of issues that come before the city commission.

Mr. Budd says he would love to see more students at the University of Florida engage with local politics. Whether it is students serving as mentors, the architectural school contributing to city building plans, or university groups receiving micro-loans from the city government, it is important for the campus community to contribute to the larger Gainesville community. Perhaps most crucially, students should go vote in local elections. As Mr. Budd says, the more people that vote, the "more complete the democracy."

Mr. Budd has been endorsed by the Gainesville Professional Firefighters, the African American Accountability Alliance, Zero Waste Gainesville, the Equality Florida Action PAC, 7 former mayors of Gainesville, and Bill Cervone, the state attorney for the 8th judicial circuit. "Harvey Budd is the candidate and Commissioner who brings mature, experienced and responsible business and fiscal perspective to [policy formation]," says Mr. Cervone. "I support his re-election and urge everyone to vote for him regardless of partisan or other affiliations."

Mr. Budd is asking the city of Gainesville to re-elect him, because he thinks he has the experience necessary to "do a lot of good things for all of Gainesville, and especially for the people that need it the most."

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CANDIDATE: GAIL JOHNSON

Profile by Shiloh McPherson, Student Fellow



The Gainesville City Commission currently consists of five men and one woman. Gail Johnson is seeking to double the number of woman and African American representation in the March 20th election. As a Gainesville native, University of Florida alumni, small business owner, and single mother, Johnson is deeply rooted in the community. Her platform seeks to address issues such as affordable housing, east side development, transportation, the environment, and economic inequalities. Specifically, she hopes to expand the Gainesville For All initiative with more quality programs, raising wages as much as allowed, providing equal opportunity within senior programs and childcare, and more.

I asked Ms. Johnson about the issues facing the city. “Living in a city where segregation dominates, this election is incredibly important. This is a very significant time where policy and activism need to meet. On the outside, things may look great with the development of the west side, Butler Plaza, and the University, however, this progression is not afforded to all. We need a better foundation to advance parts of this community that have been hindered by de facto segregation. The homeownership gap is now wider than ever and this can be fixed by redistributing resources,” she told me.

Johnson attended Eastside High School and later the University of Florida. After leaving for New York, her return to Gainesville prompted a desire to open a small business called Delicious. Delivered. “Coming back to Gainesville, I have seen our local character fade away. Small businesses need better protection and focusing on the economic development within these will allow many to move forward,” said Johnson.

Local leaders are calling on members of the community to work on connecting East, West, and University portions of the city. Johnson’s campaign manager, Katy Burnett, emphasized this when asked why this election was important. “All of these decisions affect residents, students too. The University of Florida is completely surrounded by the government, whether it be buses, roads, or establishments, students need to be at the table too. I remind and urge everyone to go to a city commission meeting or watch them online, friend leaders on Facebook, follow up with them, reach out, and make a change

Johnson has been endorsed by Connected Gainesville, the Stonewall Democrats, Ruth’s List, County Commissioner Robert Hutchinson, City Commissioner Harvey Ward, and City Commissioner Adrian Hayes-Santos. “Gail has magic. When she walks into a room everyone is drawn to her. Even if she completely disagrees with you, she will sit down and listen to find common ground, and that is what sets her apart,” said Burnett.

As a resident of Gainesville, one of her largest motivations aside from dismantling the racial inequity is fighting the Trump Agenda. “This is not just about my election. This is about moving Gainesville forward; it means change. I hope this will open doors for people who never ran before and refocus our efforts to fight inequality. The divide has become too strong and people are not interacting. There are so many resources we need to redistribute but we must remember we are all citizens living together.”